

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 COLOMB 03285 01 OF 02 080430Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 TRSE-00 EB-08 DHA-05 AID-05 OMB-01
/089 W

-----007246 080455Z /13

R 070450Z SEP 77
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8085
INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 COLOMBO 3285

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, CE

SUBJ: SRI LANKA AFTER AUGUST 12 - 30 DISORDER

SUMMARY: (A) NO U.S. INTERESTS, PROPERTY OR PERSONS WERE
TARGETS DURING THE MOST SERIOUS COMMUNAL EURPTION SINCE 1958.
ONLY USG PROGRAM DIRECTLY AFFECTED WAS AID ANTI-MALARIA CAM-
PAIGN WHICH MAY TAKE UP TO A MONTH TO GET BACK TO NORMAL.

(B) INCIDENT BETWEEN POLICE AND POPULACE IN JAFFNA ESCA-
LATED AND COST 120 LIVES; 29,000 FOUND REFUGE IN CAMPS. THIS
INTENSIFIED TAMIL MINORITY FEARS. NEW JAYEWARDENE GOVERNMENT
WAS DISTRACTED FROM ECONOMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS IT
INHERITED. THE EVENTS DEMONSTRATED THE VOLATILITY OF SRI
LANKA'S POLITICS AND THE READINESS OF SOME TO USE THE TAMIL
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 COLOMB 03285 01 OF 02 080430Z

MINORITY AS TARGETS. LONG TERM DAMAGE TO THE ECONOMY IS
NEGLIGIBLE. END SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUND

AS FOLLOWING PREVIOUS HARD FOUGHT ELECTIONS, SRI LANKA HAS
BEEN SUFFERING POST-ELECTION POLITICAL HYPERTENSION. SOME
VICTORS HAVE BEEN SETTLING OLD SCORES, WHILE SOME LOSERS WERE

UNABLE TO ACCEDE TO THE RESULTS OF THE POLL WITHOUT SOME RIPOSTE.

2. THE PROBLEM THIS TIME HAS BEEN COMPLICATED BY THE LOSS OF SEATS BY THE LEFTIST PARTIES AND THE VICTORY OF THE TAMIL FRONT IN NORTHERN AND EASTERN TAMIL AREAS. IN THESE AREAS PERSONAL RIVALRIES HAVE BEEN HELD IN CHECK AND THE POLITICAL SUPPORT OF FRUSTRATED TAMIL YOUTH HAS BEEN CEMENTED BY THE CALL FOR AN INDEPENDENT TAMILNAD. GRIEVANCES OF CEYLON TAMILS AGAINST THE OVERCOMPENSATION TO SINHALESE DURING RECENT SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP) AND PREVIOUS UNITED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP) REGIMES FOR ADVANTAGES THE TAMILS HAD RECEIVED UNDER THE COLONIAL REGIME HAVE LEFT TAMIL YOUTHS AGGRIEVED, FEELINGS COMPOUNDED BY FRUSTRATION OVER HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT. PROVOCATIVE SPEECHES BY TAMIL UNITED LIBERATION FRONT (TULF) LEADERS IN AND OUT OF PARLIAMENT EXCITED TAMIL YOUTHS AND INTENSIFIED ANXIETIES OF THE SINHALESE.

THE JAFFNA INCIDENT:

3. SINCE THE 1971 INSURGENCY, JAFFNA HAS BEEN POLICED MAINLY BY SINHALESE POLICEMEN AS THE ONLY ONES THE LARGELY SINGHALESE GOVERNMENT IN COLOMBO COULD COUNT ON. LOWER RANKS INCLUDED INADEQUATELY DISCIPLINED NEW RECRUITS. THE EVENTS WERE PRECIPITATED BY A QUARREL AT A FAIR BETWEEN OFF-DUTY POLICEMEN WHO WANTED FREE ENTRY TO A CARNIVAL AND THE FAIR'S ORGANIZERS, RESULTING IN INJURIES TO SINHALESE.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 COLOMB 03285 01 OF 02 080430Z

EVENTS OUTSIDE JAFFNA

4. SINHALESE STUDENTS WHO WERE IN JAFFNA TO ATTEND THE UNIVERSITY TOOK TRAINS TO RETURN SOUTH UNTIL PASSIONS COOLED. RUMORS THEY CARRIED FROM JAFFNA PROVOKED SINHALESE YOUTHS TO ATTACK TAMIL SHOPS AND HOMES ELSEWHERE CAUSING LOOTING WHICH SPREAD TO COLOMBO AND THE SOUTH. BORED YOUTHS AND CRIMINALS SEIZED FROM VULNERABLE SHOPKEEPERS WHAT THEY COULD NOT AFFORD TO BUY.

ROLE OF THE 1971 INSURGENTS AND MRS. BANDARANAIKE

5. YOUNG EXTREMISTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SLFP WHO HAD PARTICIPATED IN THE 1971 JANATHA VIMUKTHI PERAMUNA (JVP) YOUTH REBELLION AND OTHER IRRESPONSIBLE DISAPPOINTED ELEMENTS OF THE SLFP PROBABLY TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE DEVELOPING SITUATION AND EGGED ON THE YOUTH TO GENERATE EXTRAPARLIAMENTARY DIFFICULTIES FOR THE UNP REGIME AND TO EMBARRASS IT. THERE IS, HOWEVER, NO EVIDENCE THAT MRS. BANDARANAIKE WAS INVOLVED OR THAT THERE WAS A POLITICAL CONSPIRACY. WHILE THERE WAS THIS POLITICAL ASPECT TO THE COMMUNAL DISORDERS WHICH ALLOWED THE GOVERNMENT TO ARGUE THEY WERE NOT "COMMUNAL," IT WAS TAMILS WHO MAINLY SUFFERED, RENDERING THAT EXPLANATION INADEQUATE.

ROLE OF THE POLICE AND ARMY.

6. THE POLICE DID NOT HALT THE LOOTING OR ATTACKS ON MANY INDIVIDUAL TAMILS. THIS IS EXPLAINED BY THE FACT THAT THEIR FELLOW POLICEMEN IN JAFFNA HAD BEEN ABUSED BY TAMIL YOUTH. IN ADDITION, NEW RECRUITS APPOINTED BY THE SLFP ON POLITICAL GROUNDS WERE UNTRAINED AND ANTI-UNP IN POLITICAL ORIENTATION. IN CONTRAST, THE ARMY BEHAVED BETTER WHEN THE JAYEWARDENE GOVERNMENT CALLED IT OUT.

JAYEWARDENE'S REACTION

7. THE NEW GOVERNMENT ACTED WITH RESTRAINT IN THE FACE OF THESE DIFFICULTIES AFTER THEY HAD BEEN IN PLACE FOR LESS THAN THREE WEEKS. MANY FEEL THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD HAVE INVOKED EMERGENCY POWERS AND TURNED TO THE ARMY MUCH SOONER. BUT THE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 COLOMB 03285 01 OF 02 080430Z

BETTER INFORMED AMBASSADORS AS WELL AS CEYLONESE CLOSE TO THE GOVERNMENT AGREE THAT THE JAYEWARDENE GOVERNMENT SUFFERED REAL CONSTRAINTS -- JR DID NOT WANT TO CALL FOR EMERGENCY POWERS WITHIN THREE WEEKS OF HIS ELECTION VICTORY, FOR THAT WOULD HAVE PUT HIM IN THE SAME POSITION FOR WHICH HE SO SUCCESSFULLY CRITICIZED MRS. BANDARANAIKE. WHEN THE MORE LETHAL 1958 COMMUNAL RIOTS WERE BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL BY VIGOROUS ARMY ACTION, A NUMBER OF SINHALESE WERE KILLED, A RESULT HE WANTED TO AVOID. WE BELIEVE HE WOULD HAVE PREFERRED TO HAVE ACTED MORE VIGOROUSLY TO PROTECT THE TAMILS, BUT THESE CONSIDERATIONS INHIBITED HIM.

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 COLOMB 03285 02 OF 02 070657Z

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 EB-08 TRSE-00 DHA-05 AID-05 OMB-01

/089 W

-----123632 080455Z /13

R 070450Z SEP 77

FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8086

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 COLOMBO 3285

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

THE FUTURE

8. THE GOVERNMENT WILL STRESS POLITICAL EXPLANATIONS, SINCE TO TAG THE DIFFICULTIES "COMMUNAL" RISKS STRENGTHENING THE HAND OF THE TULF SEPARATISTS. INSTEAD, THE GOVERNMENT WILL PUBLICLY EMPHASIZE "POLITICAL CONSPIRACY" AMONG DOMESTIC OPPONENTS OF THE UNP WHO SEEK TO IMPEDE UNP RULE AND PROVOKE IT INTO EMERGENCY POWERS. IT HAS ALREADY SUCCUMBED TO TEMPTATION TO BLAME SOVIET "AGENTS" WHO HAVE BEEN IN CONTACT WITH TAMIL LEADERS.

THE TAMIL TOLL

9. SOME 120 DEATHS HAVE BEEN ACKNOWLEDGED, BUT OTHERS MAY HAVE GONE UNRECORDED. THIS IS LESS THAN IN 1958 BUT THIS TIME NEARLY ALL KILLED WERE TAMIL. 29,000 WERE IN THE TRANSIT CAMPS AT THE HEIGHT OF THE FEAR, AND 5,000 WERE EVACUATED TO CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 COLOMB 03285 02 OF 02 070657Z

THE NORTH. WHETHER THEY WILL RETURN IS AN OPEN QUESTION. IN 1958 MOST EVENTUALLY RETURNED SOUTH, THOUGH SOME WITH COSMOPOLITAN CONNECTIONS PERMANENTLY EMIGRATED AND OTHERS SETTLED IN THE NORTH OR EAST. ALREADY CONSIDERABLE NUMBERS OF "REFUGEES" WHO DID NOT GO NORTH ARE RETURNING TO THEIR LOOTED HOMES.

THE GOVERNMENT AFTERMATH

10. THE JAYEWARDENE REGIME HAS BEEN DISTRACTED FROM ORDERLY CONSIDERATION OF MAJOR POLICY OPTIONS, A LOSS OF MOMENTUM WHICH CAN BE OVERCOME IF THE PRIME MINISTER LIVES UP TO HIS REPUTATION AS A GOOD ADMINISTRATOR. UNFORTUNATELY, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE FINANCE AND FOREIGN MINISTERS ARE LESS WELL-PREPARED WITH SOLID AND PRECISE POLICY POSITIONS FOR THEIR INTERNATIONAL JOURNEYS TO THE U.S. AND ELSEWHERE THAN WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE BEEN THE CASE.

11. THE VOLATILITY OF CEYLON POLITICS ONCE AGAIN HAS BEEN DEMONSTRATED. AS A RESULT, THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE WARY OF UNDERTAKING UNPOPULAR STEPS WHICH MIGHT BE USED BY ITS WELL-ORGANIZED OPPONENTS TO PRECIPITATE DISORDERS, SUCH AS REDUCTIONS IN FOOD SUBSIDIES OR ALLOWING THE PRICES OF RETAIL GOODS TO RISE IN AN EFFORT TO CURB CONSUMPTION OF IMPORTS, ETC.

THE TAMIL AFTERMATH

12. NO OTHER EVENT COULD HAVE MORE SUCCESSFULLY STRENGTHENED THE ARGUMENTS FOR SECESSION AMONG TAMIL MILITANTS. FROM THE TAMIL POINT OF VIEW A REPEAT OF 1958 MAKES RESTORATION OF CONFIDENCE THE MORE DIFFICULT. NEVERTHELESS, THE BULK OF THE TAMIL COMMUNITY DOES NOT FAVOR SECESSION, AND REASONABLE STEPS BY THE JAYEWARDENE GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE SERVICES IN MINORITY AREAS AND ADEQUATE DEFERENCE TO TAMIL INTERESTS SHOULD PLACATE TAMIL OPINION.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 COLOMB 03285 02 OF 02 070657Z

13. THE TAMIL COMMUNITY REMAINS DEMONSTRABLY VULNERABLE. EVENTS DEMONSTRATED THAT THERE ARE SINHALESE INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE EVER READY TO THREATEN ITS SAFETY AND THAT THE AUTHORITIES MOVED ONLY TARDILY TO PROTECT THEM. AS A RESULT, EXTREMIST TAMIL YOUTHS MAY STEP UP TERRORIST ATTACKS ON "MODERATE" TAMILS. MOST TAMILS WILL RETURN TO THEIR JOBS WITHIN SEVERAL MONTHS, BUT IT WILL TAKE ECONOMIC RESOURCES AND GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO RESTORE OVERALL COMMUNITY CONFIDENCE ONCE AGAIN.

ECONOMIC EFFECTS

14. WHILE THERE WERE SOME SHORT-TERM DISLOCATIONS, THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF THE DISTURBANCES ON THE ECONOMY WILL BE NEGLIGIBLE. A NUMBER OF GOVERNMENT OFFICES AND PRIVATE COMPANIES HAD THEIR ACTIVITIES CURTAILED AS MANY TAMIL EMPLOYEES DISAPPEARED TEMPORARILY. THIS WAS SERIOUS IN THE LOWER RANKS, FOR THE NON-PROFESSIONAL TAMILS FELT MORE VULNERABLE, BUT MOST TAMILS ARE EXPECTED TO RETURN TO WORK WITHIN THE NEXT WEEK OR SO. MOST SERIOUSLY AFFECTED WERE TEA PRODUCTION AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION. TEA PLUCKING WAS REDUCED WHEN MID-COUNTRY ESTATES WERE INVADED. THE EFFECTS OF THIS HAVE NOT BEEN FELT IN THE MARKET, HOWEVER, AND ADDITIONAL PLUCKING NOW THAT PEACE HAS BEEN RESTORED IS EXPECTED TO QUICKLY MAKE UP FOR THE LOSSES. FOOD PRICES ROSE SHARPLY AS A RESULT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF TAMIL SHOPS, AND THE STOPPAGE OF TRUCKS AND TRAINS FOLLOWING MOVEMENT CONTROLS AND CURFEWS. THE RUN-UP IN PRICES SHOULD BE ONLY TEMPORARY AS NATIONWIDE FOOD STOCKS ARE SUFFICIENT AND THE GOVERNMENT IS MOVING SUPPLIES TO RETAIL OUTLETS. THE GOVERNMENT BUDGET WILL BE ADVERSELY AFFECTED, SINCE FUNDS WILL HAVE TO BE MADE AVAILABLE TO HELP RETAILERS REOPEN AND HOUSEHOLDERS REBUILD, AS MOST WERE TOO POOR TO CARRY INSURANCE.

WRIGGINS

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, CIVIL DISORDERS, CASUALTIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 07-Sep-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977COLOMB03285
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770324-1213
Format: TEL
From: COLOMBO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770992/aaaacznc.tel
Line Count: 272
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: a041034d-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1369399
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SRI LANKA AFTER AUGUST 12 - 30 DISORDER SUMMARY: (A) NO U.S. INTERESTS, PROPERTY OR PERSONS WERE TARGETS DURING THE MOST SERIOUS COMMUNAL EURPTION
TAGS: PINS, CE
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/a041034d-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009